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ELIMINATION OF VIRAL HEPATITIS C POSSIBLE THROUGH EXPANDED TESTING AND ACCESS TO CURATIVE MEDICATIONS

The AIDS Institute Recognizes National Hepatitis Testing Day

Washington, DC – “In recognition of National Hepatitis Testing Day on May 19th, The AIDS Institute reminds people to get tested for hepatitis B and C, the essential first step for people with hepatitis to be linked to treatment. In the case of hepatitis C, new treatments can actually cure nearly 100 percent of people of their virus if they have access to the medications.

The AIDS Institute is also releasing an updated Coverage Guide for Hepatitis C Screening. The guide explains how, under the ACA, hepatitis C testing for baby boomers and others at risk of hepatitis C can be paid for by either private insurance, Medicare and in many instances, Medicaid.

According to CDC there are an estimated 3.5 million people living in the U.S. that have hepatitis C (HCV), yet about 65 to 75 percent of them are unaware of their infection. HCV can cause serious health problems including liver damage, cirrhosis, and is a leading cause of liver cancer, a deadly, expensive and fast growing cancer in the U.S. Baby boomers born from 1945 to 1965 are five times more likely to have HCV than any other age group. With the recent opiate epidemic, the U.S. is experiencing an unprecedented increase in HCV among young adults. New cases have more than doubled since 2010, increasing to 2,194 in 2014.

To combat the escalating increases of HCV, the CDC and the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) recommend a HCV screening test for all baby boomers and periodic testing for people at high risk.

The National Academy of Sciences recently released a report that concluded we can eliminate hepatitis C as a public health problem in the U.S. with the right resources, commitment, and strategy, including scaled up testing programs.

“Elimination of viral hepatitis in the U.S. won’t be possible until we see increased investments in comprehensive hepatitis testing, surveillance and educational programs," commented Nasima Hossain, Senior Policy Associate, Hepatitis for The AIDS Institute. “Congress must address this public health epidemic by increasing funding for the CDC’s Division of Viral Hepatitis, which is currently funded at only $34 million for the entire country." The AIDS Institute and its partners urge Congress to increase funding to at least $62.8 million in FY2017.”
“Testing is vitally important in the long-term strategy to eliminate hepatitis C in the United States,” said Michael Ruppal, Executive Director of the AIDS Institute. “It is a valuable tool to link patients into treatment and care. With deaths from hepatitis C reaching an all-time high in 2014, killing more people than HIV and tuberculosis, it is time Congress stepped up and increased funding for the CDC, so they can adequately do their job to help identify and end this public health threat.”

For information about National Hepatitis Testing Day, including a location near you to get tested, go to the National Prevention Information Network or HepinfoNow.org

To access the updated HCV testing coverage guide go to: http://bit.ly/205iIiB

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The AIDS Institute is a national nonprofit organization that promotes action for social change through public policy, research, advocacy and education.

For more information and to become involved, visit www.TheAIDSInstitute.org or write to us at Info@theaidsinstitute.org, and follow The AIDS Institute on Twitter @AIDSAdvocacy and Facebook at www.facebook.com/The-AIDS-Institute.